



Dutch Fork Lake, Washington County

2025 Trap Net, Hoop Net, and Night Electrofishing Survey

Introduction

Dutch Fork Lake is a 91-acre Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) owned impoundment located in Washington County near the town of Claysville, PA. The lake's spillway was damaged in 2004 due to flooding from Hurricane Ivan and was subsequently drained later that year. Upon completion of repairs to the spillway, dam upgrades, and then subsequent refilling of the lake in 2013, the PFBC began restocking the lake with warmwater species such as Bluegill, White Crappie, Largemouth Bass, and Channel Catfish to reestablish a fishery (Table 1). In addition, management for stocked trout also resumed at the lake the following year.

Biologists from the Area 8 Fisheries Management Office in Somerset, PA surveyed the lake in April 2018 using trap nets to assess the panfish population and in April 2019 using night electrofishing to assess the Largemouth Bass population. At the time, we captured low to moderate numbers of Black Crappies, White Crappies, Bluegills, and Largemouth Bass. The length-frequency distribution of the captured bass and crappies was good, with some nice sized bass up to 20 inches and crappies over 9 inches. Common Carp and White Sucker were the two most abundant species captured in 2018. Both species reside in low to moderate numbers in the stream above the lake and recolonized the lake by moving downstream once it was refilled. Gizzard Shad, which were not captured in the 2018 trap net survey, were observed in low numbers in the 2019 electrofishing survey.

Biologists from the Area 8 office in Somerset resurveyed Dutch Fork Lake in April, May, and June 2025. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the lake's naturally reproducing gamefish and panfish populations, to evaluate the contribution of stocked fingerling and yearling Channel Catfish to the fishery, and to update management plans for the lake.

Methods

We used included trap nets, baited tandem hoop nets, and night electrofishing to target the different species groups in this survey. Nine trap nets were set and retrieved from April 14 – 17, 2025 throughout Dutch Fork Lake targeting panfish. Ten tandem hoop nets baited with Zote soap were fished a total of 20 net/nights in June 2025 targeting Channel Catfish. Night electrofishing for black bass was conducted in May 2025 and consisted of nine runs and 2.25 hours of effort.

Table 1: Year, species, life stage and total number stocked during warm water/ cool water stockings at Dutch Fork Lake since 2013.

Year	Species	Life Stage	Total Stocked
2025	Channel Catfish	Yearling	1,800
2024	Channel Catfish	Yearling	1,800
2023	Channel Catfish	Yearling	900
2022	Channel Catfish	Yearling	900
2021	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	9,000
2020	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	4,500
2019	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	4,500
2018	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	4,500
2018	Channel Catfish	Yearling	1,820
2017	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	4,500
2016	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	8,300
2015	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	9,000
2015	Largemouth Bass	Fingerling	2,250
2014	Bluegill	Fingerling	4,500
2014	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	4,500
2014	White Crappie	Fingerling	4,500
2013	Bluegill	Fingerling	4,500
2013	Channel Catfish	Fingerling	2,700
2013	Largemouth Bass	Fingerling	2,700
2013	White Crappie	Fingerling	4,500

Results

A total of 1,739 individuals representing 12 species and 1 hybrid were captured trap netting in 2025 (Table 2). Gizzard Shad and Common Carp were two of the most abundant species. In our trap net survey, we captured 622 crappies, with none of the Black Crappies and only 4% of the White Crappies exceeding nine inches. Total abundance of crappies was high, but quality was lacking (Figure 1).

Table 2. Species, number caught, and length range for the 2025 trap net survey on Dutch Fork Lake.

Species	Number	Length (in.)
Gizzard Shad	773	Not measured
Common Carp	144	Not measured
Golden Shiner	1	Not measured
White Sucker	6	Not measured
Yellow Bullhead	3	8 - 9
Brown Bullhead	2	8 - 12
Channel Catfish	20	5 - 21
Rainbow Trout - Hatchery	43	Not measured
Rainbow Trout - Golden	3	Not measured
Green Sunfish	10	2 - 6
Bluegill	110	3 - 7
hybrid sunfish	2	4 - 5
Black Crappie	79	4 - 8
White Crappie	543	3 - 15

As with the crappie population, Bluegill size structure was poor with only a handful of fish exceeding 7 inches in length. This has been the general trend in this turbid, shad and carp infested impoundment over the years. Bluegills simply do not compete well against those two species. Predation by carp on Bluegill eggs also likely reduces overall numbers of Bluegills. Our 2025 survey revealed a catch rate of 0.02 fish/h for Bluegills 7 inches long and longer (Figure 2), which is well below the Panfish Enhancement Program guidelines of 0.51 fish/h for Bluegills 7 inches long and longer.

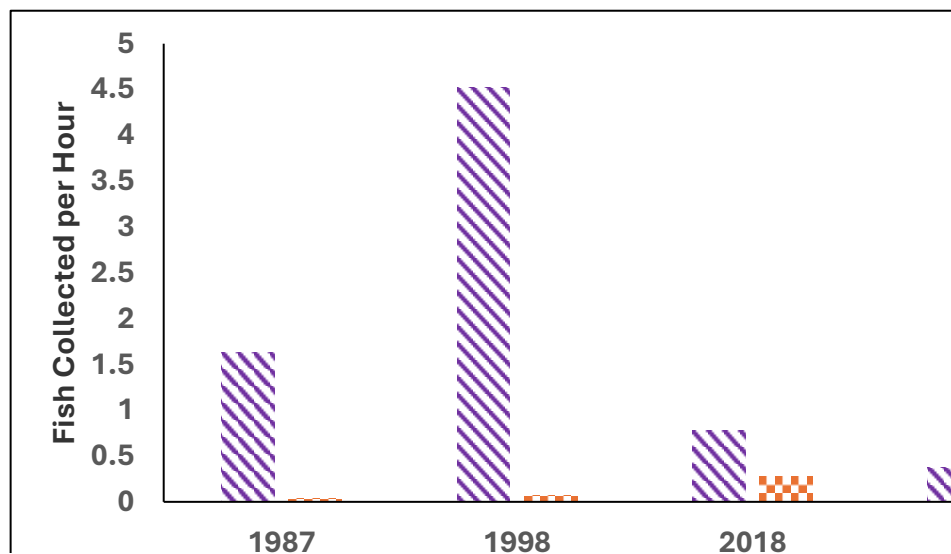


Figure 1. Trap net catch rates of crappies (diagonal-hashed bars) and crappies nine inches long and longer (checkered bars) at Dutch Fork Lake during 1987, 1998, 2018, and 2025 surveys.



One of the few nice White Crappies captured at Dutch Fork Lake

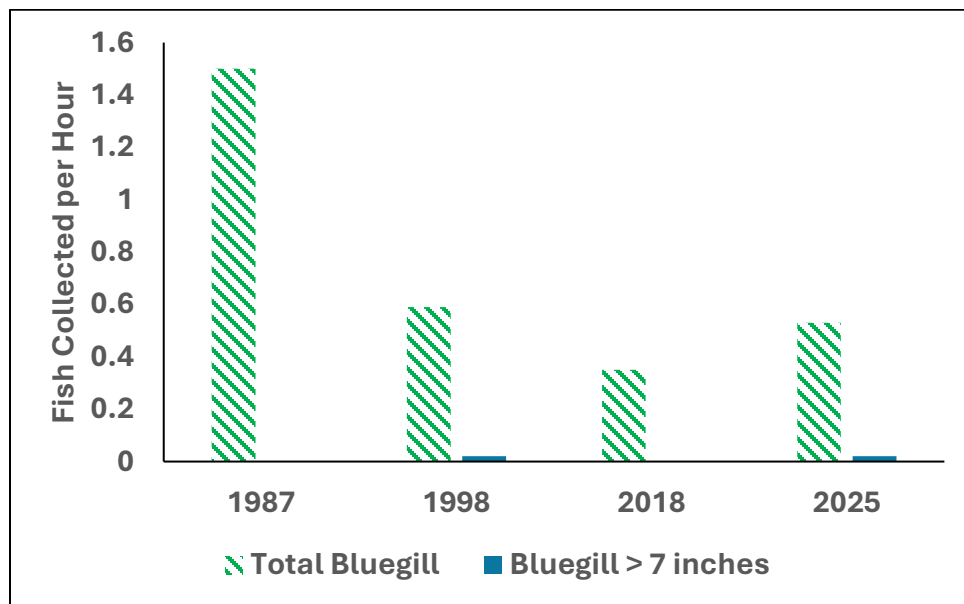


Figure 2. Trap net catch rates of Bluegills (diagonal-hashed bars) and Bluegills seven inches long and longer (solid bars) at Dutch Fork Lake during 1987, 1998, 2018, and 2025 surveys.

Channel Catfish were captured in both trap nets and hoop nets at Dutch Fork Lake. Twenty Channel Catfish were captured trap netting (Table 2) and 24 were captured hoop netting (Table 3). Fish ranged in length from five to 25 inches between the two gear types. Decent numbers of Yellow Bullheads were also captured in hoop nets, with 52 individuals between seven and 14 inches in length captured (Table 3). Catfishing should continue to improve at Dutch Fork Lake as the PFBC stocks yearling Channel Catfish on an annual basis at this impoundment. Channel Catfish are a long-lived species in Pennsylvania with fish commonly reaching 10 to 20 years old. Given the abundant forage, some big Channel Catfish will likely start showing up in a few years as fish stocked in the mid-2010's grow older and larger.

Table 3. Species, number, and length of of catfish species caught during the 2025 hoop net survey on Dutch Fork Lake.

Species	Number	Length (in.)
Channel Catfish	24	9 - 25
Yellow Bullhead	52	7 - 14

The Largemouth Bass population has also declined since the 2019 survey at Dutch Fork Lake. In 2025, we captured only 25 bass in 2.25 hours of electrofishing, with only 16% of the bass exceeding 15 inches in length. Predation of bass eggs by the abundant Common Carp population may be limiting recruitment of bass in this impoundment. For bass ages 2 – 9 at Dutch Fork, we handled four or less fish per year class, suggesting recruitment may be a long-term issue in this turbid impoundment.

Bass catch rates in 2025 were the lowest recorded at Dutch Fork Lake. Only 11 fish/h were captured in total, with less than five fish/h for bass 12 inches long and longer and less than 2 fish/h for bass 15 inches long and longer (Figure 3). Previous surveys have revealed well balanced bass populations at Dutch Fork, with plenty of fish over 12 and 15 inches.

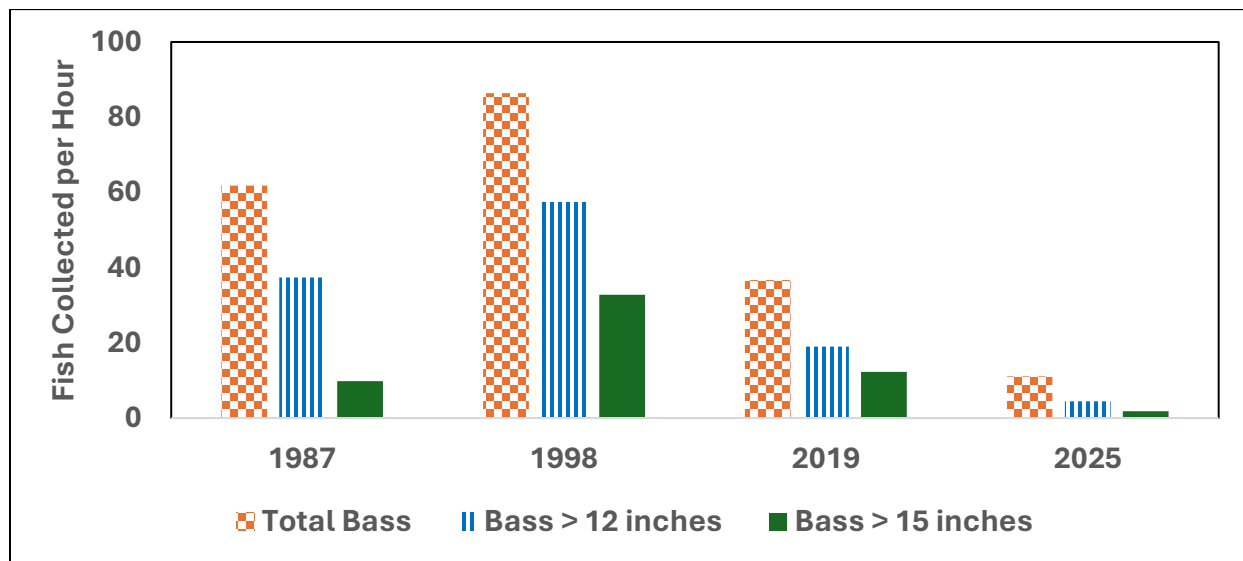
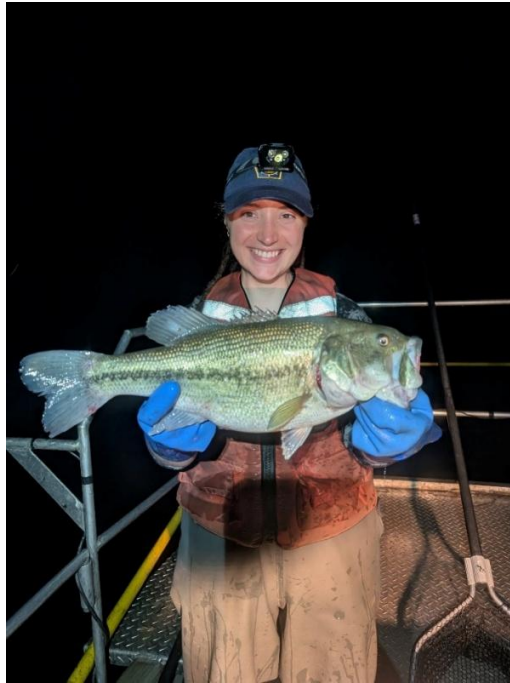


Figure 3. Electrofishing catch rates of Largemouth Bass (checkered bars), Largemouth Bass 12 inches long and longer (vertical-hashed bars), and Largemouth Bass 15 inches long and longer (solid green bars) at Dutch Fork Lake during 1987, 1998, 2019, and 2025 survey.



Fisheries Biologist Aide Darby Byington with one of the few good bass captured from Dutch Fork Lake

Discussion

Unfortunately, with the explosion of the Gizzard Shad population and the continued proliferation of Common Carp, the panfish quality has decreased substantially since the previous survey in 2018. A reduction in carp and shad abundance is necessary to improve desired gamefish and panfish abundance and size structure at Dutch Fork Lake. Both Bluegills and crappies displayed poor size structure compared to previous surveys. This has been the general trend in this turbid, shad and carp infested impoundment over the years. Gizzard Shad often outcompete panfish for food whereas the feeding behavior of Common Carp, also known as “rooting”, increases suspended sediment in the water and reduces visibility, which impairs the feeding ability of fish such as Bluegill. Predation by carp on Bluegill eggs also likely reduces overall numbers of Bluegills. Dutch Fork Lake often remains turbid in times of little rainfall, which is attributed to the dense carp population.

Yearling Channel Catfish stocking will continue to provide an additional predator that can forage on small carp and small to medium-sized shad. Supplemental stocking of fingerling Largemouth Bass will be initiated in 2026 to increase abundance of this piscivorous species as bass recruitment is likely limited by carp predation on bass eggs. Historically, additional piscivores such as tiger muskellunge and Walleye have been stocked in Dutch Fork in the past with little contribution to the fishery. Saugeyes, which were also historically stocked, survived well, and contributed to the fishery, may also be considered for shad and carp control if the PFBC can obtain fingerlings.

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